

a disgrace? Is that scary? Does that say we all must fight this tooth and nail?

Now Republicans in Louisiana are even pushing a bill that could throw women and their healthcare providers in prison for life—for life.

This is the America that Senate Republicans have made possible—an America where women in many States could be forced to follow through on their pregnancies against their will; an America where abortions can be all but eliminated in more than half the States in the country; an America where many States provide zero exceptions for something as evil as rape or incest. These laws could put women and girls in serious danger. And none of this is theoretical anymore; it is written into the veracity of the laws that have been passed by the hard right at the State level. And we know more are coming.

All of this I bring to the feet of my Senate colleagues as we prepare to vote later this week. No more running. No more hiding. No more diversions. Leader MCCONNELL can't talk about the actual effects of the law except when he made that one statement. Always diversions. Always about "Oh, look what they are doing" because they don't want the American people to know how hard right, how fiercely anti-women, how vicious some of their laws are.

I ask my colleagues to think carefully about their choice later this week. No more running. No more hiding. The vote will shine light on every single one of us. It will be like a floodlight, and we will each have to make our positions clear.

Again, I ask my colleagues to think carefully about their choice later this week because the consequences of this vote will stay with us for the rest of our time in office. The Nation will be watching. The rights of millions of American women are at stake, and they will be watching. And there will be no hiding from where each of us stands on this most precious, most private, most personal decision that women ever have had to make when it comes to their own lives.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

INTERNET

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam President, it has been a wonderful weekend in Tennessee. We had the annual West Tennessee Strawberry Festival out in Humboldt, TN. Quite honestly, I think the strawberries were better and sweeter this year than ever before. There was wonderful strawberry shortcake and deserts. It was a wonderful weekend. It provided such a great opportunity to talk with parents and to hear from Tennesseans, from moms and dads about things that were of concern to them.

I had a mom make a comment to me that I think each of us should listen to and take to heart. I know the Presiding Officer knows how hard a parent's job is because she is a mom.

I look at my children and my grandchildren, and I thought about this lady's comment. She said, you know, when she was growing up, she felt like that when she came home, that was the safe harbor; that is where she knew she was going to be safe. But today, she said she feels like many times, the enemy is within those four walls because of what children are exposed to online.

Like many parents, she began to pay more attention during COVID, and what she has found out has just astounded her. Like many parents, she feels the hardest part of her job is keeping her children safe and providing them with the environment that helps them grow into the very best person they could possibly be.

I really related to that. My husband often would say: We need to teach our children how to love and how to laugh and how to work and how to pray. That is something that we have done. We have raised our children so that they would love one another and their fellow man and love this country and appreciate the opportunities that we are given. We have raised them to believe in their faith and to exercise that faith every single day. We have also taught them and reared them to believe in a very purposeful life—always giving more than you take and leaving things in better shape than you found them.

Now, as Chuck and I reared our family, what we didn't want to do was hand down a bunch of mandates to the kids and not give them explanations. What we tried to do was to teach them and give them the knowledge that they would be able to function without us and would develop that discernment and make those wise decisions. I know that that is something that most parents do: teach those children so that they can make wise decisions on their own and leave the door open so when they feel threatened or vulnerable, they know they can come to you and talk about it.

On this point, Big Tech and the radical left have one thing in common. Their interests are best served if parents are not spending time parenting, because what Big Tech and many of the radicals are doing is using social media platforms to take children who are vulnerable and then push them into actions on social media platforms. It is, indeed, a toxic environment for our children on these platforms. That online element is at the top of a long list of things that have parents really worried about what is going on in this country. Summer is coming on, and parents are paying attention to this.

They are looking at other concerns. Inflation has absolutely decimated their savings accounts. When I talk to Tennesseans, sometimes they will talk about how much money they could save during the Trump years, and they are glad they did because inflation is now eating away at those savings that they had banked. Crime in the streets and drugs in our communities have

turned the nightly news into a horror show. People cannot believe the way crime has grown. Much of it is driven by that open southern border.

Parents are telling me that they are a little bit unsettled that they can't trust what their kids are learning in school in that those lessons are going to be in line with history, with civics, with reality, and this bothers them. It is why we are seeing school board races as the hot races of this year. It is why we have—whether it is Virginia Beach or San Francisco—people being tossed off of school boards. It is because what they were teaching was not in line with our Nation's history.

But, when it comes to the influence of tech, that is where parents feel like they are surrounded. As I said, there is a mom who said she once thought, inside those four walls, there was safety; but now she feels that it is not because of what they are seeing.

It is difficult for parents to understand how all this screen time is affecting their children because Big Tech keeps changing the rules to fit their business strategies. Mind you, that business strategy is, How many eyeballs can they capture, and how long can they hold them? because that means they make more money on the ads that they sell. Indeed, Instagram admits they are an ad company. They are an ad company. They make money by getting you to watch them. The longer you watch or the more deeply you run through a thread, they are making more money.

I would remind my colleagues that many of today's parents grew up alongside the tech companies, and now they are watching these tech companies have a stranglehold on their children's lives. They are the Facebook early adopters, many of today's parents of young children. This means that they learned a long time ago that online interactions bring out the worst in people. They know that "once it is on the internet, it is there forever" is true, and they probably wish their digital footprints were a little bit smaller now that they have children and are looking at it as parents.

The point is these parents are not anti-tech; they are pro-tech, but now their kids are falling into the same traps that they did. They are overwhelmed because Big Tech is actively sabotaging their attempts to pull their children to safety and away from so much screen time. They know that the people who run these social media companies have zero desire or incentive to control the flow of toxic content into the timeline of underaged users. It is just too lucrative an operation for them to give up. As I said, they need those eyeballs; they need them glued to the screen.

Now, when I and other members of the Consumer Protection Subcommittee presented executives from Instagram with evidence that they were actively enabling predatory content, they claimed our evidence was

anecdotal. Parents know this was a falsehood, and so do we. By its very nature, Snapchat is a predator's dream; TikTok is a hot bed of foreign propaganda; Twitter is a free-for-all, and they are going to stay that way as long as their executives keep making money. They are following the dollar.

Of the service they provide, they continue to say: Well, it is free. The service is free.

The sad thing is, it is our children who are the product. Our children and their usage online—that is the product that these tech companies are using to make money and pad their pockets. All you have to do is look around at the state of discourse in this country to know what this kind of exposure will eventually do to an impressionable child, especially after isolation from school lockdowns during COVID.

This isn't a question of bridging a generational divide. Parents understand that they need to be involved in their kids' lives. They want to be involved in their children's lives. It is sad and hurtful and devastating when they are not involved. They accept that times change and that they will have to do their research if they want to keep up and make certain that they are keeping their children safe, but they will never accept Silicon Valley's argument that they aren't smart enough to understand what is going on.

Unfortunately for Silicon Valley, the Senate has done the impossible and rallied behind bipartisan legislation to give parents and kids more control over their online experiences, and you are right—Big Tech is fighting back.

Back in February, Senator BLUMENTHAL and I introduced the Kids Online Safety Act. Here is what it would do:

First, it would force platforms to give minors the ability to protect their information; disable addictive product features; and opt out of algorithmic recommendations.

Next, it would give parents the ability to help control their kids' online experience as well as a dedicated channel to report predatory behavior. Predatory content and content that promotes self-harm, suicide, and eating disorders to minors will now, indeed, be a problem for these platforms to deal with—no more denial or deflection.

We also included requirements for annual risk assessments and access to datasets we can use to assess safety threats to underaged users.

It should be obvious by now that American parents have had enough of powerful people trying to control their children. They have said no time and again to the Biden administration's radical socialist agenda. They have said no to the racial politics the unions want to inject into public school curriculums, and now they are saying no to Silicon Valley.

I think it is our duty to give them the help that they are looking for. I urge my colleagues to join Senator BLUMENTHAL and me and support the

Kids Online Safety Act and to do this in support of parents. They are not going to let this issue go. When I talk to moms, this is one of the things they talk about the most: as I said, inflation, the border, crime in the streets, drugs on the streets, and Big Tech and the harm it is bringing to our children. They are going to stay on this issue because they know their children's lives and safety depend on it.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. HIRONO. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ABORTION

Ms. HIRONO. Madam President, Republicans continue to be totally shocked by the leak of a draft Supreme Court decision. But what is truly shocking is the fact that we have a radical, rightwing majority now on our Supreme Court, thanks to three Trump Justices who are poised to take away a constitutional right that women in this country have relied upon for almost 50 years.

The Supreme Court has never overturned a constitutional right it has earlier conferred. And yet today, in 2022, women across the country are going to wake up and no longer have control over their own bodies once the Supreme Court stays its course to overturn both Roe and Casey. The Republican Party has sabotaged the Supreme Court, and women and girls across the country are going to pay the price.

In 13 States, the minute Roe is overturned, abortion will be illegal, and dozens of other States will move to do the same. These States are prepared to outlaw abortion with only narrow exceptions, if at all.

Imagine this. If a child is raped, Republicans will force her to give birth. If a woman's life is in danger, Republicans will force her to give birth, despite the fact that the United States already has the highest maternal mortality rate of any developed country. If a woman cannot afford to raise a child, Republicans will force her to give birth anyway. And then, once that child is born, all of a sudden, their concern for that child pretty much goes out the window.

They have done little to support women and families. They have repeatedly blocked Democratic efforts to provide healthcare, childcare, paid family leave, and more. There is nothing pro-life about that. And if a woman chooses to get an abortion for any reason, whether it be rape or medical necessity, Republicans stand ready to throw in jail women, doctors, and even those who help people access the procedure.

And make no mistake, if Republicans take control over the House and Sen-

ate, they will press to pass national legislation that will outlaw abortion throughout the country.

I have been an advocate for reproductive freedom for decades. When I was in college, abortion was not legal. It was the first time I wrote a political letter to the members of Hawaii's congressional delegation asking for their position on abortion. Abortion is one of the reasons I became an activist. And I fought against concerted efforts to limit abortion in Hawaii during the 14 years that I served in the Hawaii State Legislature. I knew then, as I do now, that women should be able to control our own bodies.

And, sadly, the threat to women's freedom is as real today as it was when I was first advocating for this right decades ago.

I am proud that Hawaii was the first State in the country to decriminalize abortion before Roe. So regardless of the Supreme Court decision, women's reproductive freedom in Hawaii will be protected. But for how long? So many women across the country do not live in States like Hawaii that protect the right to an abortion.

Barriers to abortion access have always existed—barriers like finding childcare, taking time off from work and travel and transportation and more. The number of women dealing with the obstacles to get the essential healthcare they need will skyrocket if Roe is overturned.

And we know who is going to be harmed the most: people who can't travel, including people with low incomes, people with disabilities.

Due to systemic barriers and this country's legacy of racism and discrimination, Black, Latino, indigenous, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and other people of color disproportionately feel the effects of abortion bans and restrictions.

We know this is true because we have seen it play out in Texas. Already, women in Texas have to travel hundreds of miles to seek abortion services. Many women in Texas do not have the means or the opportunity.

When you read Justice Alito's draft opinion, it is quite clear that this Justice has harbored a desire to overturn Roe for the 16 years he has been on the Supreme Court. And, now, thanks to the three Trump Justices, his radical opinion on abortion is no longer dissent but the majority opinion. This is our worst fears coming true.

Meanwhile, I listened to MITCH MCCONNELL, the Republican leader, this morning, who kept calling Democrats "extreme" in our view—in our commitment to supporting a woman's right to abortion. He said that he would never support "smashing" the filibuster on this or any issue. Well, he had no problem smashing the filibuster when it came to Supreme Court Justices, and that is the very reason that three radical Trump Justices got on the Supreme Court in the first place and the reason why women are about